



The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom - “I Have a Dream”

Learning Targets/Objectives:

- Discuss the purpose of the March on Washington.
- Understand the role of the March on Washington during the Civil Rights Movement.

Success Criteria:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of the March on Washington by creating flyers.
- Reflect on the "I Have a Dream" speech.

Lesson Content Overview:

On August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr., the SCLC, and many other civic and civil rights organizations, including the NAACP, CORE, SNCC, and the Urban League, peacefully took to the streets and structures of the nation’s capital. Over 250,000 people gathered on the grounds of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. to signify the need for federal government intervention and protection of minority rights. Originally scheduled to deliver his speech earlier in the day, King graciously allowed others to go before him. When he addressed the crowd, King delivered his “Promissory Note” speech, better known as his “I Have a Dream” speech, expressing the reasons why a quarter of a million people arrived in the District of Columbia to “dramatize a shameful condition. . . . to cash a check.” The first part of King’s partially handwritten speech directly tied the movement to the ideals of natural rights: the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness expressed in the Declaration of Independence; of freedom, democracy, and equality championed in the American US Constitution. Additionally, King addressed how the country failed to protect its Black population

In a sense we’ve come to our nation’s capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was the promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note in so far as her citizens of color are concerned.¹

Although King spoke about his “Dream” for several years prior to the March on Washington, the significance and timing of his passionate and heartfelt expression could not have been more perfect. It is important to remember that the demonstration was a consolidated effort to pressure the government to secure and protect the basic rights of American citizens. The fact that these rights were not available to African Americans made the expression of King’s “Dream” a valuable asset in securing the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and, subsequently, the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The following day, a *New York Times* columnist wrote that King was an “anguished echo” from each American visionary. “Roger Williams calling for religious liberty, Sam Adams for political liberty, old man Thoreau

¹ Martin Luther King, Jr. “I Have a Dream.” August 28, 1963. Yale Law School, The Avalon Project Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy. Retrieved from https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/mlk01.asp



denouncing coercion, William Lloyd Garrison demanding emancipation, and Eugene Debs crying for economic equality – King echoed them all.”²

SEL Opener:

- **OPTION 1:**
 - 1) Show images of the Lincoln Memorial and the Reflection Pool.
 - 2) Show images from the March on Washington while playing the "I Have a Dream" speech.
- **OPTION 2:** Have the students march around their desks while playing "We Shall Overcome".

Instructional Activities:

- Activity 1: Read [Martin Luther King, Jr. and the March on Washington](#) by Frances E. Ruffin
 - Discuss the characters, plot, feelings, vocabulary, summary, and them
- Activity 2: Watch the Video: [Bet You Didn't Know: March on Washington](#)
 - Complete the K and W portion of the [March on Washington KWL Chart](#)
- Activity 3: Read **Epic Books:** [The March on Washington and Its Legacy](#) by Duchess Harris
 - Discuss the characters, plot, feelings, vocabulary, summary, and themes.
- Activity 4: Watch the [Kids Recite 'I Have a Dream' Speech](#)
 - **Small Group/Individual Work:** Complete the [Draw Freedom and Your Dream Worksheet](#)
 - **Large Group Discussion:** Have the students present their drawings.
 - Acknowledge the themes.
- Activity 5: Watch the [History Specials: King Leads the March on Washington](#)
 - **Small Group/Individual Work:** Complete the [Guided Notes](#) / [Answer Key](#)
 - **Large Group Discussion:** Review the guided notes.
 - Discussion Questions: *What was the purpose of the March on Washington? Why did so many gather in Washington DC? What was the overall message from Dr. King's speech?*
 - Acknowledge the themes among students' answers.

² James Reston. "Martin Luther King Brings His Audience Alive." *New York Times*. August 29, 1963. 9C.



Assessments:

- **OPTION 1:** Complete the [“I Have a Dream” Reflection](#)
- **OPTION 2:** View the flyers from the March on Washington: [Flyer #1](#) | [Flyer #2](#)
 - Using Canva, Google Drawing, etc., create a new poster for the March on Washington

Adaptations for Student Needs

IEP/504:

- Sizes of student groups range
- Students team up with a peer partner, while others would prefer to work individually.
- There is a variety of small-group work
- Chunking information
- Visual cues and wait time
- Visual supports (maps, images, PowerPoint slides, handouts)
- Assessments will be modified, and students given extra time

ELD/ELL/ESL:

- Modified/simplified reading material
- Content-related lists/handouts of key terms
- Text is supported by visuals and connected to real-life experiences